12 to suffer life term for killing woman landless leader

Staff Correspondent · Khulna

THE Khulna district and sessions judge court awarded 12 persons life term rigorous imprisonment and fined Tk 10,000 each, in default one more year RI, for killing Karunamayee Sardar, a landless movement leader of the country's southwest.

Judge AKM Istiak Hossain delivered the verdict after recording and examining the statements of 21 prosecution witnesses on Thursday, more than 16 years since the killing on November 7, 1990.

The court also ordered three years of additional jail term to all the 12 convicts for hiding the body of Karunamayee.

Eight of them were also awarded with seven years' RI and Tk 5,000 penalty each for hurling bomb and opening fire that killed Karunamayee.

The convicts are Surman Morol, Abul Kashem, Abdul Hai Gazi, Hakim Sheikh, Pabitra, Nailakkhya Baidya, Farukh, Bareq member, Zihad Sardar, Pradip Kumar, Liakat Sardar and Bhabaranjan Roy. Barring Pabitra, the other 11 persons are now in jail.

The court acquitted four accused persons of the charges as they died in the meantime. They were- prime accused and influential shrimp trader Wazed Ali Biswas and his close aides Abdur Razzaq, Anil and Nirapada.

The court released other 19 persons as charges pressed against them were not proved.

According to the court and police sources, on November 7, 1990, a gang of miscreants led by Wazed Ali Biswas went to Harinkhola village under Paikgachha upazila in Khulna district to encroach a land for shrimp farming. Members of local 'poor cooperative society' protested against the encroachment and their leader, Karunamayee Sardar, led a procession.

At one stage, miscreants hurled bomb and opened fire on the procession, leaving Karunamayee spot dead. Her head was blown off and the attackers took the body of Karunamayee away.

The victim's eldest son- Ajit Krishna Sarkar lodged two cases accusing Wazed Ali Biswas and others.

The then officer in charge of the thana and also investigation officer of the case, Shahabuddin Mia, submitted the charge sheets on December 16, 1990 accusing 35 persons keeping Wazed Ali Biswas as the prime accused.

KARUNAMAY[illegible]E MURDER

Verdict eases 16 yrs of pain of kin

Tapos Kanti Das · Khulna

'AFTER 16 long years, we have finally found some consolation in seeing the court awarding punishment to the killers of my grandmother this morning,' the victim Karunamayee Sardar's grandson Ananda Sardar told New Age on Thursday afternoon.

Karunamayee was bombed and shot to death at Harinkhola village under Paikgachha upazila in Khulna district on November 7, 1990 when she was leading a procession against shrimp cultivation that raised the salinity of land and water. Her head was blown off in the attackers. The killers also took away her body.

Ananda said, 'My father Ajit Krishna Sardar lodged a case in connection with my grandmother's killing, seeking punishment of the killers who wield much power and influence in the society. He [Ajit] died on November 7 last year after observing the 16th death anniversary of his mother but without seeing her killers being punished.'

Noor Ali Gazi of Bigordana village and Urmila Sardar of Harinkhola village, who were in the procession and were injured in the attack, wept from joy when the judge declared the verdict on Thursday noon.

They expressed satisfaction at the sentence and said the punishment of the killers would give some peace to Karunamayee's departed soul. They termed the verdict as a triumph of the landless people over their powerful oppressors.

The coordinator of Nijera Kori and a noted human rights activist, Khushi Kabir, expressed his satisfaction at the news of the verdict, saying that though it came after a long time, it was a victory of the oppressed, deprived and agitated people of the south-western zone and the movement against saline-water shrimp cultivation.

The people of Khulna had to wait and carry on a movement for more than 16 years to finally get justice, Khushi, also a women's leader, said in a statement on Thursday evening.

She also paid homage to the memory of New Age correspondent Manik Chandra Saha, who, too, was bombed to death in Khulna on January 15, 2004, as his writings were for protecting the environment of the region from the devastating effects of saline-water shrimp cultivation.